

Date Marking of Potentially Hazardous, Ready-to-Eat Foods

Wisconsin Food Code Fact Sheet #16

Date marking must be used for:

- Potentially hazardous, ready-to-eat foods (i.e. cold foods made with meat, eggs, dairy products, etc.) that are prepared at a retail food establishment and are intended to be held in the refrigerator for more than 24 hours; or
- Potentially hazardous, ready-to-eat foods that are made and packaged at a processing plant which are opened and are intended to be held in the refrigerator for more than 24 hours.

Once the product has been made or opened, its container must be dated.

- The date must show the day by which the food must be sold, consumed or discarded.
- This date must be seven (7) days from the date it was processed or opened. It must include the day the product was made or opened. For example, if the food product was opened on April 10, 2001 then it must be date marked April 16, 2001.

The Potentially Hazardous, Ready-to-Eat food may be frozen during this time. If it is frozen, it either needs to be labeled with the number of days it was in refrigeration before freezing, or when thawed it must be consumed or discarded within 24 hours.

- If frozen food is properly labeled when placed in the freezer and the intent is to hold the food for more than 24 hours after removal from the freezer, it must be date marked to indicate the day the food is to be consumed, sold or discarded.

- To determine the proper date, you must take seven minus the number of days the food was in refrigeration before freezing. This number tells you how many days that you have left to use the product. The final date on the package must include the day in which the food is taken from the freezer.

- For example, if the food was held in refrigeration for 3 days, you would subtract 3 from 7 ($7-3=4$) to get 4 days. Therefore, the food must be consumed in 4 days including the day it was removed from the freezer. If this product was taken out on April 10, 2001 then it would have to be sold, consumed or discarded by April 13, 2001.

The date marking system is not for the consumers. It is an in-house system that all employees working with the food must understand.

Smoked fish sold at retail must comply with the dating, labeling and temperature requirements specified in section 70.22, Wis. Adm. Code, Label and Sale of Smoked Fish. This product has a 14- day shelf life.

Exemptions for Some Commercially Processed Foods:

- Aged hard cheeses, such as Cheddar, Colby or Swiss and some semi-soft cheeses; and
- Whole, unsliced portions of a cured and processed product with the original casing maintained on the remaining portion, such as bologna, salami, or other sausage in a cellulose casing.

